

Week 7: Online Social Networking and Gaming

March 3 – March 10

This is an odd week. The topics are perhaps at this point only peripherally educational. Currently social networking and online gaming are almost always blocked at high schools and few people (outside of librarians, teenagers and tech-geeks) think of them as tools rather than tremendous time-sucks. As the parent of a 19 year old Tumblr junkie and a 15 year old Xbox 360 savant, I have been known to yell “Turn off that infernal machine!” several times a week.

However, it is important for librarians – those of us on the front line of technology in schools – to understand how kids use these things and how they are evolving. Social networking, in particular, is hugely popular with kids and is quickly growing in popularity with adults as well. Massive Multi-user Online Role Playing Games have been around since the beginning of the internet. They used to just be text-based and now they have amazing graphics and they allow kids (and adults) to play with people all over the world. Even gaming consoles, like xbox360, allow players to go online, find their friends, join a team and play other teams. Handheld games like the PSP and Nintendo DS allow players to network and share the same space on their devices.

If you are working in elementary schools, these may not yet be a blip on your radar, but your fourth and fifth grade boys are probably aware of them. And as technology continues to morph who knows what they will turn in to?

I used to have a large section in this week’s content about Second Life. Five years ago it looked like the next big thing. Now, it is still an interest virtual world, but not something that I would have you spend time looking at. On the other hand, Twitter, which no one knew anything about 5 years ago now falls into both the blogging category and social networking.

Gaming is hugely interactive now. For this week you don’t have to play World of Warcraft or Halo 4 but look into them and try to find a player you can interview. If you need help locating a teenager, I have access to several you can borrow.

There is no Richardson in your **reading** this week! I am all agog over it. I found what I think is a nice overview of the social aspect of online life by Robin Good, he looks at a study from the National School Board Association on social networking and education. Kopytoff has an article about what the MacArthur Foundation found when they started the “Digital Youth Project”. And Heather Wolpert-Gawron looks at how Facebook can be co-opted by teachers.

Your **exploration** sites this week are different in that some of them require payment and personal information. What, are you surprised? Things have all been free and easy up until now, haven’t they? Fear not! You need neither pay, nor divulge your personal information. Here is the sweet part – no one knows you on the internet. You can just make stuff up. It’s true! We will talk about this more in the assignment section. For

now, know that you are to go to the following. You don't have to sign up for these, but they should all have an "about" link that you can click on to get a sense of what the site is offering. Please take a gander at Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Kaboodle or Ning. Also look into World of Warcraft. There are also two sites that are incredibly popular with teens – chatroulette and omegle – where you can chat with complete strangers. This frankly scares the hell out of me. It seems like kind of a wild west thing where anything goes. I don't know that you necessarily want to go look at these sites, but you should be aware of them.

You have two assignments this week. And one is easy-peasy. You need to choose a social network site – Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn. Facebook is the most popular and there are lots of nice middle-aged librarians there, myself included. You can keep your profile private and no one can access it without your permission. In addition, if you are really wary about this sort of thing, or if you are in the witness protection program, you can sign in with a secret identity. Just let me know it is you.

MySpace allows you to set up a page that reflects your own style. It has become a tool for bands to post information and music, more than a personal network. Facebook has a lot of little applications, but everyone's format is the same. It is a little more public, as well. And LinkedIn is more business-oriented. It is more a networking kind of site.

So – pick one! If you decide on Facebook, please friend me so that I can see your page. You can unfriend me next week, if you like. If you go with MySpace just send me your link. I rarely use LinkedIn, but if you decide that is the way you want to go, I have an account gathering dust there. If you are already in a social network, add a paragraph or two to your blog about how you currently use it and what educational implications you think it might have.

The second assignment is to write a 3-5 page position paper about social networking/virtual worlds/MMORPGs and what you see their values and pitfalls. Most (okay, all) of the reading I gave you is positive – but feel free to take the other side, too. We are looking at educational uses in this class, but feel free to talk about the social piece, the psychological (the preponderance of violence in some games). Go down whatever road interests you. Keep in mind that these things are ever-changing and try to form a picture of what the future might bring.

One thing I want you to do for this paper is interview a gamer. Ideally, it would be a teenager. If you don't know any gamers, I have a few of my library aides and friends of my son, who are willing to do telephone interviews. (I cleared this with their parents.) I want you to find out what they see as they game, as well as their perspective on the value of gaming and some of the negative qualities. You can also talk to your local YA librarian or ask the person behind the counter at your local Game Stop! Please let me know if you need me to provide an interview subject. (Rubric is below.)

And as ever - recount your social networking and gaming experience in your blog and look in the “**discussions**” threads for topics you wish to comment on. Don’t forget to follow the rubric.

Reading:

Kopytoff, Verne. “Kids Gain Valuable Skills From Time Online.” San Francisco Chronicle, November 20, 2008. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/11/19/BUKE147TA1.DTL>

*Good, Robin. (2007). “Online Social Networking And Education: Study Reports On New Generations Social And Creative Interconnected Lifestyles”. In Master New Media [online] Retrieved October 26, 2008 from http://www.masternewmedia.org/learning_educational_technologies/social-networking/social-networking-in-education-survey-on-new-generations-social-creative-and-interconnected-lifestyles-NSBA-20071109.htm

Wolpert-Gawron, Heather. "Social Media in Education: The Power of Facebook." Edutopia, May 7, 2010. <http://www.edutopia.org/social-media-education-examples-facebook>

Exploration:

Facebook <http://www.facebook.com>

Myspace <http://www.myspace.com/>

LinkedIn <http://www.linkedin.com/>

Pinterest <http://pinterest.com/>

Tumblr <http://www.tumblr.com/dashboard>

Ning <http://www.ning.com/>

Kaboodle <http://www.kaboodle.com/>

Second Life <http://secondlife.com/>

World of Warcraft <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com>

Omegle <http://omegle.com/>

Chat Roulette <http://www.chatroulette.com/>

Assignment:

Sign up for a social network and set up your page. If you choose Facebook, friend me. If you choose MySpace, send your link. If you choose LinkedIn, email me and I will find you there.

Write a position paper about students and social networking, virtual worlds and MMORPGs (online games)

Recount your social networking and gaming experience in your blog.

Discussion: Remember to share your take on the reading and your experiences exploring with your classmates in the yahoo group.

POSITION PAPER RUBRIC

Paper must be between 3-5 pages in length.

Bibliography can be in whatever style you like, parenthetical or in-text citations preferred.

Paper should reflect your opinion as influenced by reading, experience and interview.

If you need clarification, please email.